

**My first known blood relative**

**A psychotherapeutic exploration of female adoptees who give birth  
to biological children.**

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## **Abstract**

Research studies on adoption fail to consider the female adoptees experience of having their own biological children. Most research on adoption focuses on birth mothers and adoptive mothers in the adoption triad. This research study focused on the lived experience of female adoptees which included the early experiences of the adoptees, the relationships between the adoptees and their adoptive mothers, what occurred when the adoptees had their own children and the adoptees subsequent relationships with their biological children.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data gathered from qualitative semi structured interviews. The participants in this study were enabled to discuss their lived experience in an open and non-judgmental environment. The main themes identified were the adoptees experience of being chosen as a baby, how the adoptees felt different growing up and the realisation of meeting their first blood relative when they gave birth. Other themes that emerged were the adoptees experience of empathy and anger for their birth mother and an overprotection towards their own biological children.

It was concluded in this study that the experience of female adoptees when they give birth to their own children needs to be researched further and that issues for adoptees do not end when they have their own families.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

There is considerable research on adoption from the point of view of the adoptee's earlier years, birth mothers who give their babies up and the adoptive parents who care for them. What is lacking in this research is what occurs when adoptees give birth to their own children. Adoptees seemed to be forgotten in the extensive research of this topic when they move on to the next stage of life to have their own families. Often the when an adoptee gives birth this is the first known relative to this adoptee (Collishaw, Maughan, & Pickles, 1998; Greco, Rosnati, & Ferrari, 2015). Price (2016) found in a study of adoptees who adopted children, that they came to a fuller understanding of their own adoption and built a deeper connection with their adoptive mothers. Consideration needs to be given to adoptees who give birth to biological children.

Attachment with a baby begins in the womb and continues when the baby is brought into the world (Winnicott, 1992). When a baby is adopted this bond is broken and a new bond is formed with the caregiver. Bowlby (2005) asserts that secure early attachment can be formed with a primary caregiver that is not the biological parent but still some adoptees often have a sense of not belonging (Dublin, 2013; Philips, 2011; Verrier, 2009). Adoptees are often told by their adoptive parents that they were chosen and that they are special. Verrier (2009) asserts that this story of being chosen often puts pressure on the adoptee to live up to the expectations of their adoptive parents. In contrast to this, Kranstuber and Kellas (2011) argue that being told that adoptees were chosen helped to solidify their sense of self and they learned to value and trust themselves. Jones (1997) purports that this story is an attempt by the adoptive parents to emanate the adoptive parent's happiness and to cover up the loss of the adoptees birth mother. When adoptees go on to have their own children, Jones (1997) posits that this life stage also contributes to their sense of identity. According to Hampton (1997) when adoptees give birth the connectedness they lost through their own adoption is often restored.

The objectives of this research are:

- To contribute to the small amount existing research within the area of adopted women who give birth.
- To explore the early attachment of the female adoptee and the relationship with her adopted mother.
- To explore what occurs when the female adoptee gives birth.
- To consider how the female adoptee attaches to her biological child.
- To explore if there were any concerns of the adoptee that her baby will be lost or taken away.
- To discover if the adoptees meeting with their biological baby precipitates a need to re-connect with her birth mother if this has not already taken place.
- To explore if giving birth to a biological baby solidifies the adoptees identity.

## **Chapter Two: The Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Adoption is a life altering event which affects all members of the adoptive triad, the adoptive mother, the birth mother and the adoptee (Silverstein & Kaplan, 1982). When a child is given up for adoption the bond and the attachment with the birth mother appears to be broken and new bonds and attachments are attempted to be formed with the adoptive family. The subject of adoption has been researched in great detail, but the research falls short when adoptees reach adulthood and have their own biological children who might be their first known blood relatives. This literature review will discuss early attachment, the adoptees sense of belonging, the adoptees desire for a blood connection, the adoptees relationship with their birth mother, their adoptive mother and what occurs when adoptees become mothers.

### **2.2 Attachment**

Bowlby (2005) informs us that secure early attachment does not have to be experienced with the biological mother but a primary caregiver. A primary caregiver is one who is in the child's proximity and is better able to cope with the world than the baby. In the case of adoption the primary caregiver often being the adoptive mother is a secure enough base for the child to form an attachment. Winnicott (1992) believes that attachment with the baby and the mother begins during pregnancy and that the mother knows the feelings of the baby. That is, the baby forms an attachment with the mother in the womb and this attachment is broken when the baby is given up for adoption. This view is supported by Chamberlain (1990) who has found that a baby, shortly after birth can pick out a mother's face from a gallery of pictures. Sharpe (2012) questions how good enough parenting can be given to a child who has come to them in some type of caring capacity and a child that the adoptive parents know nothing about and one that



they have not experienced in the womb. Jones (1997) puts forward the idea that disruption in early attachments can cause problems in intimate relationships later in life and adoptees may find it difficult to free themselves from the feelings of being rejected by their birth mother. Feeney, Passmore, and Peterson (2007) found that there is a small risk factor for adult adoptees in relation to attachment security and notes that this supports Borders's *et al.* (2000) findings that the adoption experience is a lifelong process. That being said, (Collishaw *et al.*, 1998) together with Greco, Rosnati and Ferrari (2015) highlight that very little is known about the long term implications of adoption for psychosocial adjustment in adult life and how adoptees are in forming a couple and the transition into parenthood. Dublin (2013) and Phillips (2011) found that even though the attachment or bond with the birth mother appears to be broken on separation, the tie with the birth mother is still maintained by some adoptees

In her work with the all the members of the adopted triad and having adopted a daughter herself Verrier (2009) discovered what she described as the "primal wound", a wound of the adoptee that is physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. She further explains that this wound is caused by the child's separation from their birth mother. She explains acting out as the child's attempt to connect with the adoptive mother. She cites the results of research carried out by the Parenting Resources of Santa Ana, California that 30% to 40% of the 2% to 3% of children who are adopted were found in residential treatment, juvenile halls and specialist schools. Adoptees had more difficulty in school, socially and had a high rate of youth offending, sexual promiscuity and running away from home.

### **2.3 A Sense of Belonging and the Blood Connection**

Adoptees are often searching for a place to belong or state that they do not quite fit with their adopted family. One adoptee interviewed by Verrier (2009) explained that she maintained she did not belong to her adopted family even though she did not know that she was adopted. This

feeling of not belonging is supported by Philips (2011) and Dublin (2013) wherein some adoptees experienced being like outsiders in their adopted family. In a case study undertaken by Lord (1991) of Bob even though not female sensed that he did not fit in although he was part of a close-knit family. This was at odds with his experience of also being fortunate. The most in depth exploration of adoptees who become mothers was published by Hampton (1997). She conducted research of twenty women who were adopted and focused on their transitions to motherhood, their experiences of labour and their relationships.

The desire to have a blood connection is a common theme in the small amount of literature published on female adoptees as parents. In Hampton's (1997) study, one of the participants stated that "this baby is going to be the first person I've ever set eyes on in this world that came from my own blood" (p.100). Another participant in Hampton's (1997) study states that "a blood relative of my very own...he's my family now" (p.100). The adopted mothers in this study declared that having their own biological children helped them to make whole the connectedness that they stated was lost through their own adoption. The adoptees pregnancy and subsequent birth in some cases prompted the search for their own birth mother. A common quote that appears on many adoption websites and which reflects the loss and lack of sense of belonging that some adoptees feel is one by Alex Haley, (2016):

"In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage- to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness" (Back Cover).

Although the paper by Day *et al.*, (2015) focuses primarily on transracially adopted mothers the theme of longing for a first blood relative to connect the mother to her heritage is similar to many adoptees stories (Dublin, 2013).

Jones (1997) holds the view that the need for a biological link in the adoptee is something that will contribute to their sense of identity. Jones (1997) also puts forward the idea that the lack of literature on the subject of adult adoptees is the family's and the adoptee's need to retain their fantasy that the adoption did not exist.

#### **2.4 The Three Mothers**

Hampton's (1997) research also found that when adoptees become mothers, the relationship with the two mothers comes into focus that being the mother who adopted her and the birth mother who gave her up. In the case of the adoptive mother who may not have been able to bear her own child, Scabini and Rossi (2012) cited in Congress (2012) and Hampton (1997) found that some adoptive mothers were envious of the adoptee and her ability to bear natural children. In studying the effects of adoption on women in terms of relationships and parenting it was found by Collishaw *et al.*, (1998) that women who had themselves been adopted were likely to delay childbearing by approximately 1.8 years compared to the general population group they were tested against but in general there was very little difference in terms of parenting and relationship breakdown. In her study of the adoptees who were about to give birth she found that all participants experienced a strain on the relationship with their adoptive mothers during their pregnancy but having them at the birth strengthened their relationship. Together with Dublin (2013) and Phillips (2011), Hampton (1997) also found that adopted daughters still retained a connection with their birth mothers even though they were separated and that some women expressed a desire to see their children being born and how they suggested that it was almost like experiencing their own birth.

Some literature in this area remains solely focused on the adoptees search for the birth mother. In a newspaper article written by Carlo Geblo in 2016 the interviewees experience of having her own children is very quickly bypassed by the interviewer and he states “Palmer married, had children”. The search for her mother does not appear to have been prompted by her having her own children.

## **2.5 When Adopted Women Become Mothers**

Having children can bring about significant changes to the new parents lives. It is when these parents are adopted these changes take on a more complex meaning. The new baby is a link to the biological mother’s heritage and issues surrounding this may be brought to the surface for the first time for the adopted mother (Congress 2012). The research in this area is very minute (Day, Godon-Decoteau, & Suyemoto, 2015). In an unpublished article by Humphries (2003), research was undertaken of seven adopted mothers and amongst its findings was that having their own biological child helped mothers to solidify their own identity that they lost through the experience of adoption together with the need for mirroring (cited in Day *et al*, 2015).

## **2.6 Fear of Repeated Loss**

Phillips (2011) writes of how becoming a mother put her in touch with feelings about her adoption that she had suppressed. She expressed that when she gave birth to her first child, she had given birth to her “whole self” (p.121). She feared that she would lose her baby when she was pregnant and when he was born she could not leave him out of her sight in fear that he might go away. Phillips (2011) likens this to how she was separated from her own mother and her constant search for her on street corners when she was younger. The fear in pregnancy or post birth that the baby will be taken away is a common thread in the literature on female

adoptees who become mothers. This need to keep their babies close was reported by a number of participants in the study by Hampton (1997).

Congress (2012) cites the view that past adoption research has focused mainly on the experience of adoptees in childhood and in adolescence. This prompted the conduction of a study of 34 couples with one of the members of the couple being adopted. The aim of this study was to explore the couples transition to parenthood. It was found that the adoptee's definition of their identity is revisited at each stage of life events. Similar to the experience of Phillips (2011) and Hampton's (1997) study, the anxiety that their baby might be lost or taken away was experienced by most of the adoptees. In contrast, some adoptees expressed that they believed their child was lucky to have their love and protection and not to be given away or abandoned just like they were. This paper also found that when the adoptee gives birth it introduces birth into the adoptive family history which may not have been previously experienced. The child's birth was seen by some adoptees as a gift to their adoptive family, although in some cases it emerged that the adoptive parents were not able to reconcile their problems with fertility and were envious of their adopted child. In giving birth to their own child the adoptee must also face up to the issues of why they were given away and may realise that they were not a mistake (Phillips, 2011).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

While the literature is extensive in the area of adoption it falls down at the point where adoptees reach adulthood and specifically when they go on to form a couple and have their own biological children (Farr, Grant-Marsney, & Grotevant, 2014). In the small amount of literature that was available in this area many issues that adopted adults face were identified, namely their sense of belonging and the need for a blood relative. A major theme that arose was the fear and anxiety of expectant adopted mothers and adopted mothers who had just given birth

that their babies might be taken away from them and their need to be with them at all times. Further research in how adoptees form an attachment with their biological babies and how their attachment with their two mothers has impacted them would be further merited in this area.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

A qualitative semi structured interview approach to research was taken in this study. Qualitative studies provide information of the participants lived experiences (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, & Ali Cheraghi, 2014, p.2). The qualitative approach is a sensitive and flexible way of finding meaning to a phenomenon and it aims “to push the horizon of understanding by pursuing open ended questions and following the data where it leads” (McLeod, 2011, p.10). Semi structured interviews are the most common method of collecting data in qualitative studies in psychotherapy (McLeod, 2011, p.71).

### **3.2 The Interview Process**

The interviews were conducted on a one to one basis to gain rapport and to facilitate empathy (Malan, 1995, p.84). They were held in a comfortable and quiet environment without the possibility of disturbance. The interviews were recorded on a digital recording device and this recorder was stored in a locked box with access only available to the researcher. Each interview lasted approximately forty minutes. The interviews were transcribed, and all documents produced from the transcripts were password protected. The password was only to the knowledge of the researcher. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants identity.

### **3.3 Sample and Recruitment**

The sample included 3 female adoptees who have given birth to at least one biological child. The sample was recruited through colleagues known the researcher. The participants were known to each other but not to the researcher. There were no other criteria considered.

### **3.4 Method of Data Analysis**

The method of data analysis used was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is usually carried out for small samples of participants and therefore is a very suitable method for this study. IPA examines the personal lived experience, the meaning of it and how the participants make sense of that experience. IPA requires interpretation on behalf of the researcher. Smith (2015) describes this as the researcher trying to make sense of what the participant is trying to make sense of. Six questions were used as guidelines to gain the information from the participants (see Appendix A). After the interviews took place each transcript was read several times and notes and insights were made in the margin together with emerging themes. The text and information gathered from the semi structured interviews was analysed (McLeod, 2011, p.76). Analysis of the data was ongoing on the part of the researcher and the data analysis was made in this study after each phase of data collection (McLeod, 2011, p.77). Connections with the emerging themes were made and others were removed if they did not support the other themes. When this was done the researcher was left with a list of master themes. Each master theme was then presented with extracts from the participant's transcript (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

### **3.5 Ethics**

Due to the sensitivity of the subject of this research the principle "primum no nocere" (your first duty is not to do harm) was adopted throughout this study (Malan, 1995, p.245) The wellbeing of the participants was at all times considered. The researcher explained to each participant the reason as to why the research was being undertaken. Qualitative studies can be ethically challenging, and the researcher has a huge responsibility to the participant. Each participant signed a consent form (see appendix B) and the researcher explained to the participants that they could withdraw at any time during the interviews. Anonymity was



discussed with each participant. It was explained that in such a small sample the participants might be identified by other participants who are known to each other. It was important that the researcher was aware of the impact of the questions on the participant. A list of supports of confidential helplines, websites and email address relevant to services for adoptees was with the researcher (see Appendix C). It was also explained that the participant can withdraw at any time during the research process (Sanjari *et al.*, 2014).

### **3.6 Potential Difficulties and Resolutions**

- If the digital recorder did not work - A back up recorder in the form of a smart phone was available with the intention that the data recorded be deleted afterwards.
- If a participant decided not to participate in the study any further – A reserve participant was available in case of one of the participants decided to not participate.
- The possible disturbance of the participant from the material produced – The researcher had a list of supports available if the need arose (see Appendix C).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Semi structured interviews were undertaken to gain understanding of the adoptees personal lived experience. The questions asked were guidelines only and this facilitated the participant to speak more freely about their experienced and offered the researcher the scope to make further enquiry.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present the data collected from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The demographic details of the participants were set out in the table below. Master themes were offered and illustrated with vignettes taken from transcripts of the recordings.

### **4.2. Demographics**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>
<b>Daphne</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Kim</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Peggy</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>4</b>

### **4.3 Master Themes Identified**

- Being Chosen and the adoptees early attachment
- Feeling Different
- Relationship with adoptive mother
- Feelings evoked in relation to the birth mother of the adoptee
- Meeting their first blood relative
- Reconnection with birth mother
- Overprotection of biological children
- Empathy towards birth mother

### 4.3.1 Being Chosen and Early Attachment

Together with the exploration of the adoptees experience of having their own biological children an exploration into their own adoption was conducted. This was undertaken to gain an insight into their early attachment. The most prevalent theme that emerged in this area was that all three participants had been told that they were chosen specifically by their new parents. All three participants fondly remembered feeling special on being told this. All three participants reported having a good enough early attachment in the early years with their adoptive mothers and feeling loved.

Daphne recalled the story the mother told her:

*“they went into a big long room and there were loads of babies in cots and she went to the end of the line, I was in the last cot and she picked me”*

Kim reported a similar story:

*“it was put that you were specially chosen and that every other mammy and daddy had to take what was given to them ... but my mammy and daddy went down and picked me especially”*

Peggy offered a more graphic image of the process of being chosen:

*“The one image I do have ... in my head of this room painted in yellow, like a nursery and all these cots and ... they went along and they picked me”*

Daphne described herself in later years as being rebellious but she always knew her mother loved her.

*“she was a very good mother, always there ... always at home, you knew she loved you”.*

Kim whose relationship became strained with her mother in later years through family circumstances emphasised the good early attachment experienced.

*“there was a lot of love there too and I think she got the early years ... she really did her best”*

Peggy always knew she was adopted but stated that she had always been quite stable within her family.

*“I knew I was adopted and I was quite happy with that.”*

#### **4.3.2 Feeling Different**

While all three participants in this study reported a happy early experience, two out of three of the participants had the experience of feeling different. Daphne explained of her childhood:

*“I knew I was kinda different from the other kids”*

Kim who explained that she was never treated any different from other family members still experienced being dissimilar.

*“They [family members] never made any differentiation but I always felt different growing up ... you’re never complete. Yeah, I always felt that I was a bit different”*

Peggy narrated the opposite understanding on being part of the family:

*“absolutely all through my upbringing and absolutely still today ... I probably fitted in more than [other family members]”.*

#### **4.3.3 Relationship with Adoptive Mother**

The main subject of this paper was the adoptees experience of what occurred when they gave birth to their own biological children. How did this affect their relationships with their adoptive mothers and their birth mothers? The participants reported no change in the relationship with

their adoptive mother. Kim's adoptive mother had died before she gave birth to her first child, so this could not be explored.

*"She didn't exist, she died in the [month] and I met my future husband in the [month] and two years later I was pregnant and married"*

Daphne recollected her adoptive mother's happiness on the birth of her grandchild and how her adoption did not really feature.

*"No, I don't think anything changed, I think she was delighted to have another grandchild. I don't think the adoption part came into it with her"*

Peggy reported no change in the relationship but that her birth mother was on the mind of her adoptive mother: When her baby was born Peggy remembered:

*"the first thing my [adoptive] mother said ... was did she mention her birth mother so it very much obviously on our minds. She started to cry".*

#### **4.3.4 Feelings Evoked in Relation to Birth Mother of the Adoptee.**

Before becoming pregnant with their first children, all three of the participants had made attempts to reconnect with their birth mothers. In each case their birth mothers did not indicate any desire to reconnect. Even though the reconnection had already been sought, the pregnancies of each adoptee evoked different feelings for each participant relating to their birth mother.

Daphne considered why her mother did not feel the desire to reconnect with her, this was awakened when she saw her baby:

*"I had already tried to meet her... no it didn't awaken a desire to meet her, but it did make me fierce angry about her, it's hard to understand why she wouldn't have taken up that opportunity ... [to reconnect], I couldn't really understand it, because she had made the difficult decision, which was the really difficult decision to give the child*

*away. I did feel an awful lot of anger at that time and not being able to understand why when you look at your own child and you wonder why would you do such a thing and why you wouldn't you take the opportunity to make it right"*

For Kim, the birth of each child evoked the urge to try again to reconnect even though her first attempt and reconnection had been rebuffed. Kim was of the opinion that her birth mother was not only rejecting her again but also rejecting Kim's children:

*"it had already happened ... so I rang her again. When ... was born, you think she would at least want to know about her grandchildren, I felt a bit annoyed really in a way"*

As opposed to Daphne's experience of anger and Kim's annoyance evoked when their children were born Peggy acknowledged how hard it must have been for her birth mother to give her away.

#### **4.3.5 The First Blood Relative**

For all participants in this study, their babies were the first blood relatives that the participants had met. Kim used these exact words and described the overwhelming feelings she had for her baby and the joy of seeing parts of herself in the baby:

*"I could eat [the baby] alive, [the baby] was delicious, and this was my first blood relative, this was the first blood relative that I have had. I wasn't a blood relative, so here this was the first baby that was mine, my flesh and blood ... I just idolised [the baby] ... was the first baby ever born on this earth ... I really feel I'm blessed ... I still look at them today and I wonder are from my side or whatever"*

Daphne was proud of the fact that she could for the first time see something of herself in another:

*“I dunno your just kinda looking at them, saying gosh that’s you know, even now looking at my kids, the similarities, you see little traces of yourself in your own kids so that’s a nice thing to do [when you are usually] around people that you don’t see traces of”.*

*“so it was great, I’ll never forget it. ye really delighted with that. That was eh, when she was born, that was a defining moment when she was born”*

Peggy also alluded to the fact that this baby was hers:

*“I just held them and thought, I’m so lucky. I felt this is mine, this is truly mine.*

*I remember it vividly, with my first, oh yeah I’ll always remember it and I’ll always remember holding [the baby] for the first time and saying to [husband] it must have been very hard for my mother to give me away”*

#### **4.3.6 Adoptees Attachment With Their Biological Children**

In exploring how the adoptees attached with their biological children, two out of three participants illustrated that their friends have remarked on how they are overprotective of their children. Daphne asserted that she was not sure if this was related to her being adopted:

*“my friends would say to me that ... I’m over protective towards my children. They are the most precious things ... and whether that is associated with adoption, I don’t know. I think I feel more protective because of that [adoption] but I don’t know ... I would spend a lot of time telling them how much I love them ... I don’t think people think about it consciously but I suppose if you do feel, if you have feelings of rejection very deep down in you then you obviously don’t want your own children to feel that, so you might over compensate for that. I always wanted to create kind of a just four walls where we*

*were in it. Our little family was in it and where everybody was safe and that was kind of just a thing I wanted”*

Kim reiterated this:

*“some friends of mine have said this, this is not to do with my ... and it’s just instinct is that I tend to be a bit overprotective of my children. I feel sometimes that I over compensate ... now that could be because of my own background, because it was an insecure background, I wanted to make the world perfect for them ... my children were going to have the best world possible ... they were going to have a very secure family ... I don’t want anything to hurt my children. I don’t want them to have any disappointments, you know, I want everything to be perfect. I get terribly upset for my children, and I suppose too because I never had a family, I, have a family now and ... I’m going to hold on to them”.*

Peggy did not consider any overprotection of her children. Strong feelings were only elicited on the birth of her first child.

#### **4.3.7 Empathy Towards Birth Mother**

Another major theme that emerged was the eliciting of empathy for each participant’s birth mother and what they must have endured in giving their babies away. Peggy challenged the assumption that all adoptees harbour antipathy for their birth mothers:

*“I think most adopted children don’t feel bitter or resentful you know ... apart from feeling sadness for her, apart from feeling empathy for her”*

While Kim and Daphne had expressed an anger towards their birth mothers, they were able to acknowledge how it must have been for their birth mothers to part with them.

Daphne acknowledged how difficult it must have been for her mother at that time:



*“she made the really difficult decision to give the child away”*

Kim illustrated an empathy for her birth mother:

*“there is a part of me that feels very sorry for her”.*

Peggy acknowledged her birth mother’s difficulty.

*“apart from feeling sadness for her, apart from feeling empathy for her, feeling how bloody hard it must have been for her but nothing else. It must have been extremely hard for my mother to give me away. That’s the first thing I said”.*

While a very small sample was used for this research, there was good evidence in support of the master themes. The adoptees early experiences were one of being chosen and feeling special. They all had a good early experience with their adoptive mothers. While the birth of their children did not change the relationship with their adoptive mothers, the births elicited different feelings towards their birth mothers. Two reporting anger and all three reporting feelings of empathy. Two out of three participants expressed a huge desire in wanting the best for their children and to keep them safe.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to explore issues and events surrounding the incidence of female adoptees giving birth to their own biological children. This research could not be conducted without considering the experience of their own adoption. The researcher explored the adoptees early experience of their own adoption to gain insight into their early attachments. The relationship with their adoptive mothers was also explored. The researcher was curious as to whether the birth of the adoptees biological children evoked them to think about their own birth mother and if it sparked any desire in them to reconnect with their birth mothers if this had not already occurred. Any changes in relationships with the participants adoptive mothers coinciding with the birth of the adoptees baby was also explored. Finally, how the adoptees attached with their biological children was explored.

### **5.2 Being Chosen and the Adoptees Early Attachment**

On exploration of the participants early adoption it was reported by all three participants that they were told they were chosen by their families. This concurs with the findings of Kranstuber and Kellas (2011) and Verrier (2009). All three participants recalled fondly being told this story. Daphne remembered asking her adoptive mother to repeat the story to her on several occasions. In contradiction with Verrier (2009) that adoptees interpret being special as having to live up to their adoptive parents' standards for them was not reported by any participants. In keeping with Jones (1997) theory that this was the adoptive parents attempt to cover up the pain, the chosen story for the participants appeared to solidify their attachment with their adoptive mothers. All three participants learned of the truth of their adoptions in later years when they were in a better position to take on the information. Daphne asserted that this story

of being chosen appealed to her as a young child. Kim also reiterated that this was in the “early days of her adoption”.

### **5.3 Feeling Different**

On further investigation of the adoptees early experiences two out of three of the participants reported feeling different growing up. This is supported in the literature of Verrier (2009), Phillips (2011) and Dublin (2013). Peggy emphasised that she was always included with her extended family, yet she still did not feel complete. Peggy’s experience was similar to the case of “Bob” as set out in Lord (1991) wherein she reported still feeling very close to her extended family and especially her cousins to the present day. Daphne stated feeling different from “the other kids”. The researcher interpreted this as feeling different from the other children in her peer group. Haley (2016) reiterates this sense of loneliness and lack of belonging reported by Kim and Daphne. However, Peggy reported never feeling different from and that she fitted in more than most members of her family. Similar to the findings in Lord (1991), Peggy stated that she experienced a good fulfilled life. It could be said that this echoes Jones (1997) findings to relive the fantasy that the adoption did not exist.

### **5.4 Relationship with Adoptive Mother**

All three participants reported having good early relationship with their adoptive mothers. Their early enough attachments with their caregivers supports Bowlby's (2005) theory of secure attachment with the primary caregiver being one who is not a biological parent. Peggy reported having an ongoing good relationship with her mother throughout her life. Daphne reported that in her early teens she became rebellious. Verrier (2009) would explain this as an attempt on behalf the adoptee to connect with the adoptive mother. Kim’s mother had died before she started a family which she said left her freer to get on with her own life. Congress (2012) found in rare cases that the relationship with the adoptive mother becomes strained on the birth of the

adoptees biological children. Whereas Collishaw *et al.*, (1998) report that there is no change in the relationship. Two out of three participants reported no change in the relationship with their adoptive mother. In the case of Kim, her adoptive mother had died. Daphne reported that her adoptive mother did not even consider the fact that she was adopted and was just happy to have another grandchild. Peggy reported that the adoption was very much on the mind of her adoptive mother when she asked if Peggy had mentioned her birth mother at the birth.

### **5.5 Feelings Evoked in the Adoptee on the Birth of their Biological Children**

On the birth of Peggy's first biological child she said she was immediately put in mind of her birth mother and she thought how hard it was for her to give her up. Peggy's adoptive mother also on hearing of the birth asked if Peggy had mentioned her birth mother. This would support Hampton's (1997) view that the relationship between the two mothers comes into view. The birth of Peggy's child brought to light all of the members of the adoption triad. Peggy thought of her birth mother and how it was for her to give Peggy away. Peggy's adoptive mother was also reminded of Peggy's adoption and if this ignited Peggy to think of her and possibly search for her. This was not concurrent with the experience of the other two participants who reported a feeling of anger and annoyance towards their birth mothers. Although it is to be noted that these feelings were also in conjunction with feelings of empathy for the situations of their birth mothers.

### **5.6 The First Blood Relative**

The meeting of their baby as their first blood relative was a strong theme for all of the participants in this study. This was especially poignant for Kim who was cognisant that this baby was her first blood relative. This very much parallels Hampton's (1997) findings in her studies of adoptees. Daphne described how it was difficult to be around people who bore no resemblance to her and how it was difficult for her when others made the presumption that she

was biologically related to her adoptive family. For the first time Daphne could see traces of herself in another. Similarly, Kim reported that she searched for resemblances and wonder who the baby looked like. This was a new experience for both Kim and Daphne. This links to the findings of Jones (1997), Day *et al.*, (2015) and Dublin (2013) of the wish for the adoptee to solidify their sense of identity. Peggy while not obviously making the blood relative link found that her first baby was something that was truly hers alluding to the fact that she had been missing something of herself.

### **5.7 Attachment with Biological Children**

A strong theme for two of the participants in this study was the feeling of being overprotective of their children. It was noted that this overprotection was pointed out to the participants by friends of theirs and was not an issue that was conscious for them. This overprotection can be linked to the findings of Congress (2012), Phillips (2011) and Hampton (1997) wherein adoptees maintained that they feared that they would lose their babies and experienced the strong desire to keep them safe. Daphne was unsure if her overprotectiveness was due to her adoption but acknowledged that the early rejection that she had suffered by her birth mother might have led to her overcompensation. Daphne explained that she showed a lot of love to her children in the way of hugs, which was something that was not forthcoming with her adoptive mother. Kim related this overprotection to her insecure background. Kim had been secure in her early years but circumstances changed later on. She acknowledged that she always wanted a big family with brothers and sisters and this prompted her to keep her immediate family close.

## **5.8 Empathy Towards Birth Mother**

All three adoptees in this study had made attempts to reconnect with their birth mothers and this was not successful. Feelings of empathy were expressed by all three participants of this study towards their birth mother. Both Kim and Daphne expressed feelings of anger and annoyance at their birth mother on the birth of their babies however this was preceded by feelings of empathy. The birth of their babies prompted them to consider the reasons for their adoption and the reluctance of their birth mothers to reconnect. Daphne wondered why her birth mother would not take the opportunity to make things right. Kim made several attempts to reconnect with her birth mother and she suggested that this was a rejection of not only her but of her own children. Kim also acknowledged how hard it must have been for her mother. Peggy also shared this view and challenged the assumption that all adoptees harbour feelings of resentment towards their birth mothers. This supports the experience of Phillips (2009).

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Items for Further research**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore the incidences that occur when a female adoptee gives birth to a biological child. This was achieved through semi structured qualitative interviews. The lived experiences of the adoptees were phenomenologically interpreted by the researcher and major themes were identified. These themes were contrasted with the literature previously gathered in this area by the researcher and was explored to consider if it was transferable to the participants. The findings in this study cannot be a representative of all female adoptees as this was a small sample but the results strongly supported the literature gathered. Two out of the three participants had similar experiences while one participant reported some differences in her experiences.

To explore the whole lived experience of the adoptees in this study their early attachments and experiences with their adoptive families were considered. In the exploration of the adoptees early attachment all participants reported having a good early attachment. What was especially poignant was the adoptees recollection of being chosen. The stories told to them by their adoptive parents were recalled fondly by all participants which helped to solidify their early attachments for them. This experience is transferable to the existing literature on this topic.

The feeling of not belonging which seems to be common amongst adoptees was echoed by two out of three participants in this study. The meeting of a first blood relative was strongly recognised in two out of three participants. It was the first time for two of the adoptees to recognise something of themselves in another and solidified their sense of identity. The other participant reported that she found something that was truly hers.

While the birth of their babies did not prompt the reconnection with their birth mothers, reactions were evoked relating to all members of the adoptive triad on behalf of the adoptees.

Empathy towards their birth mothers was experienced and the assumption that adoptees resent their birth mothers was challenged by one participant. What was also discovered was anger towards their birth mothers on the rejection of the adoptee's children. With regard to the relationships with their adoptive mothers all three participants reported no change in their relationships.

A limitation to this study was the time constraint on behalf of the researcher. It would have been desirable to have more participants for the purposes of this study.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Further Research**

In conducting this present research a number of gaps appeared in the available literature. This research suggests that the following are worthy of further consideration.

- Conflicting reactions of anger and further rejection together with empathy regarding their birth mothers was demonstrated by the participants in this study. Further research in this area may facilitate better understanding of on behalf of the adoptees.
- When researching this topic, it was noted by the researcher there is very little research into adoptees when they have their own families. This is noted in the limited research found on this topic. Further exploration of this topic would be merited in this area as it seemed that is where the adoptive journey ends for the female adoptees.
- A broader research that goes beyond the adoptive mother and the birth mother would be useful in this area.
- Further exploration of how adoptees attach to their own biological children would give insight in the overprotection and fear of repeated loss would be welcome to shed light on if this is related to their own adoption.



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## **Appendix A**

- 1. Can you tell me about the circumstances of your adoption? That is, at what age where you told about your adoption?**
- 2. Can you tell me about the relationship between yourself and your adoptive mother?**
- 3. Did your pregnancy and the birth of your baby have any effect on the relationship with your adoptive mother?**
- 4. What feelings were evoked in you when your first child was born?**
- 5. Can you tell me if the birth of your baby awakened a desire to meet your birth mother? (If they have not previously re-connected?).**
- 6. Did the birth of your baby alter any feelings you make have had about your adoption?**

## Appendix B – Consent Form

### INFORMATION FORM

My name is Lynsey O’Kelly and I am currently undertaking a BA in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School. I am inviting you to take part in my research project which is concerned with exploring adoption. I will be exploring the experience of people like yourself, who are adopted and have biological children.

#### **What is Involved?**

You are invited to participate in this research along with a number of other people because you have been identified as being suitable, in having experienced adoption and becoming a mother. The interview should take no longer than one hour to complete. During this I will ask you a series of questions relating to the research question. After completion of the interview, I may request to contact you by telephone or email if I have any follow-up questions.

#### **Anonymity**

All information obtained from you during the research will be anonymous. Notes about the research and any form you may fill in will be stored in a locked secure location. Audio recordings and transcripts will be made of the interview will be password protected and kept in a secure location. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any point of the study without any disadvantage.

#### **DECLARATION**

**I have read this consent form and have had time to consider whether to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary (it is my choice) and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage. I agree to take part in this research.**

**I understand that, as part of this research project, notes of my participation in the research will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified in any use of these records. I am voluntarily agreeing that any notes may be studied by the researcher for use in the research project and used in scientific publications.**

**Name of Participant (in block letters)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date**     /     /

## **Appendix C – Supports Available**

A: Barnardos Post Adoption Service, 23/24 Lower Buckingham Street, Dublin 1

T: +353 1 813 4100

E: [adoption@barnardos.ie](mailto:adoption@barnardos.ie)

### **Adoption Rights Alliance:**

Web: [www.adoptionrightsalliance.com](http://www.adoptionrightsalliance.com)

Email: [info@adoptionrightsalliance.com](mailto:info@adoptionrightsalliance.com)

Tel: 086-8163024/086-3659516